

# The hero meets his match: the role of the enemy in Arabic siyar

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**Abstract:** *The siyar, pre-Islamic Arabic popular literature, are long detailed epics that appear at first glance to be chaotic with their multitude of characters, stories, plots and subplots. In reality, the narration is neither haphazard nor disorganized, but is structured around a pair of trios, the heroic trio (hero, ʿayyār and the outlaw knight) and the opposing enemy trio (primary enemy, future father-in-law and enemy knight). The heroic trio cannot act in a vacuum and depends on the constant interaction with the enemy trio to move the story forward. The enemies are a fundamental element of the narrative structure and are found in both Arab and Persian siyar. The characters in the trio develop through a series of narrative stages, ranging from 3 to 5. This article examines the role of the enemy trio and its members, as well as the stages of narrative evolution they pass through during the development of the sīra. The enemies are the driving force behind the action in the siyar and the gauge against which the hero and the heroic trio are measured. Without the enemies, the hero could not fully develop in his role. It is clear, then, that the storyteller is not rambling on at random but is structuring his tale around a clearly defined set of characters and characteristics.*

**Key words:** *enemy trio, primary enemy, future father-in-law, enemy knight, narrative structure in the siyar.*

## La structure narrative des siyar: le rôle des ennemis dans le roman de chevalerie arabe

**Résumé :** *Dans la littérature populaire arabe, les siyars qui paraissent au premier abord, une narrative chaotique, ne sont que la structure narrative de base d'une triade héroïque. Cette triade n'existe pas pourtant dans un vacuome mais opère en opposition constante et active en face d'une triade d'ennemis.*

*Cet article examine le rôle narratif de la triade ennemie, dont les membres sont l'ennemi pivot, le futur beau-père du héros, et le cavalier ennemi. Chacun de ces trois personnages suit une progression narrative de 3 à 5 étapes dans l'évolution de son rôle dans la sīra. On retrouve ces étapes d'une sīra à une autre, que ce soit une sīra arabe ou perse. Nous voyons donc que le conteur-auteur ne raconte pas au hasard mais tisse son histoire plutôt autour d'une structure bien solide. En effet, les ennemis sont le moteur qui dirige la narration de la sīra, ce sont les ennemis qui donnent naissance à*

*l'action dans la sīra et qui sont la mesure de la grandeur du héros. Sans ses ennemis, le héros ne pourrait pas atteindre l'apogée de son propre rôle. Les trois personnages dans la triade d'ennemis sont étudiés ainsi que les raisons pour lesquelles chacun est d'une importance fondamentale pour l'histoire.*

**Mots-clés :** *triade d'ennemi, l'ennemie pivot, le futur beau-père du héros, le cavalier ennemie. Structure narrative des siyar.*

Popular Arabic literature, known as siyar, evolved from an oral tradition and to a modern reader often seems chaotic with its lengthy narratives, multitudes of characters, and subplots within subplots. On closer study, we find the narrative in these medieval epics structured around a trio of hero with his supporters, opposed to a trio of enemies (Dumézil, 1982: 7-12)<sup>1</sup>. In this article, I examine the structure of the enemy trio, composed of the hero's primary enemy; the future father-in-law and the enemy knight. This enemy trio is a worthy opponent of the heroic trio. The conclusion of the struggle between the two is not foregone and the audience waits impatiently to find out who will win, even if they feel sure that in the end the hero will be victorious. The interaction of the two opposing trios provides insights into the worldview and the collective imagination of the people who created the siyar.

When the storyteller introduces an enemy, he give the enemy's background, his "qualifications" as enemy (strength, fierceness, cleverness, etc.), and tells stories about him. He places the enemy at the hero's level; there is no glory in defeating a weakling. The stories about the enemy may continue for hundreds of pages as a digression from the main narrative. Eventually, the enemy is placed in clear opposition to the hero in a return the main narrative. Any number of plots and battles including the enemy and the hero make take place before the enemy is either vanquished or killed. Many of these appear to be of only minimal importance, providing lively scenes and nothing more, but taken together, they make up a large part of the narrative of the siyar and thus play an important structural role.

### The primary enemy

The primary enemy controls and manipulates the other two members of the trio; he does not always overtly attack the hero. He is the "brains" of the enemy trio. The primary enemy is motivated by an ideological objection to the hero. He is always a man of social importance, a nobleman or vizier, representing the status quo, resisting change in the existing hierarchy. He opposes the hero's achieving an elevated social rank through marriage. If this enemy is not Arab, opposes the birth of children with Arab blood in his country and he opposes the introduction of Arab religious beliefs. The primary enemy uses his intelligence and gift for intrigue to instigate actions carried out by the father-in-law and the enemy knight in their attacks on the hero. He is the motivation behind nearly all the attacks made on the hero, and this psychological and personal conflict, stemming from an ideological hatred, transforms the story from a list of battles to a struggle between different ways of perceiving life.

The primary enemy moves through the narrative in identifiable stages:

- He begins as an occult or hidden enemy who manipulates others (generally the future father-in-law),
- He later becomes a clearly defined enemy,
- He makes alliances with other enemies of the hero, often within the same tribe,
- He takes refuge with the hero's other enemies outside the tribe or even in a foreign country
- He is defeated and killed.

### The future father-in-law

The future father-in-law is always a member of the enemy trio. His initial opposition to the hero is due to doubts of the hero's merits and a reluctance to accept him as a husband to his daughter. These doubts are sometimes aggravated by a difference of religion or an aversion to Arabs if the future father-in-law is not Arab. Typically, the father-in-law pretends to accept the hero's proposal of marriage, while plotting the hero's death. He sends the hero on dangerous quests for a dowry, hoping he will be killed. The ensuing travels and adventures are a major component of the siyar's narrative. While the hero is away trying to satisfy the father-in-law's demands, the latter often promises his daughter to another. The hero returns and the father-in-law sends him on an even more dangerous task. This cycle can be repeated numerous times. At the end of the story, the father-in-law is obliged to accept the hero as worthy of his daughter's hand. The father-in-law's presence throughout the sira holds the hero's various adventures together as a single story; unlike the primary enemy and the enemy knight, he is generally not killed at the end, but makes peace with the hero. This role provides the possibility of peace between the hero and his enemies and is essential to the sira's narrative structure.

The possible stages of the father-in-law's narrative progression in the sira are:

- He pretends to accept the hero's proposal of marriage to his daughter,
- He sends the hero on dangerous missions to acquire a dowry, hoping he will be killed
- He flees the tribe, taking his daughter to physically distance her from the hero; he seeks the protection of powerful knights or kings in other tribes,
- He promises his daughter's hand to the new protector, in exchange for the hero's death
- Reconciliation with the hero and the father in law accepts the hero as a husband for his daughter.

Not all stages are present in a given sira.

### The enemy knight

The enemy knight contributes physical prowess to the enemy trio, doing physical combat with the hero. The primary enemy may manipulate this character. He can act independently as well; he is jealous of the hero, and his hatred is personal. The role of enemy knight provides a counterpoint to that of outlaw knight in the heroic trio. The enemy knight may be a foreigner; he is always a fierce and forceful enemy of the hero. He is likely to use plots and treachery. He

is not a noble or honorable knight. He refuses to make peace with the hero; even when the hero captures and then releases him, a gesture that would normally call for gratitude, he still hates him. He can feign peaceful intentions to save himself, but will take up arms against the hero or his family as soon as possible. The enemy knight is the force behind many of the action sequences in the siyar. His great physical force provides narrative tension and interest because of the small possibility that the enemy knight will prevail and defeat the hero.

The enemy knight is a more simplistic character than the primary enemy and the father-in-law, his role being primarily one of introducing action into the narrative. From the storyteller's introduction of the enemy knight, new and complex stories of former exploits and actions, battles and so forth are recounted. These opportunities to take a detour from the main story line provide action-packed entertainment for the storyteller's audience without influencing the outcome of the hero's story.

The stages of the enemy knight's development in the narrative are:

- He becomes the hero's enemy at first contact with him
- He is active throughout the sira
- He is defeated and/or killed in the end.

The enemy trio is the motor driving the action of the narration: the hero is sent to a far-away and dangerous land, for example, due to the plotting of the primary enemy; or the hero is obliged to rush to the rescue of a victim of the enemy knight. In short, the enemy trio often instigates a new action sequence in the narrative and is as important as the heroic trio to the development of the narrative. I will consider the enemy trios of five siyar; as summarized in the following table:

Story	<sup>C</sup> Antar	Sayf	Fayrüz Shāh	Hamza al-Bahlawān	1001 Nights <sup>C</sup> Ajīb and Gharīb
Primary enemy	Ar-Rabī <sup>C</sup> Ibn Ziyād	the brothers • Sqardīs and • Sqardyūn	Ṭayfūr	Bakhtak	Replaced by two fathers-in-law <sup>2</sup>
Father-in-law	Mālik	Afrāḥ	Surūr	Kisra	• Mirdās • Sābūr
Enemy knight	1- Al-Ḥārīt 2- Ḍu al-Khimār, and 3- Al-Asad ar-Rahīš one after the other	Sayf Ar <sup>C</sup> ad	Ṭūmār	Zūbīn	<sup>C</sup> Ajīb

### The role of the primary enemy in *Sīrat <sup>C</sup>Antar*

In *Sīrat <sup>C</sup>Antar*, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> Ibn Ziyād plays the role of the primary enemy. The conflict between this primary enemy and the hero <sup>C</sup>Antar begins very early in the sira and continues until the end of the story, eight volumes later. Ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> is a typical primary enemy. He is violently opposed to the hero's social advancement. He is a lord and chieftain of the Banu Ziyād tribe; he is a very

rich man and very clever. He is extremely powerful in the tribe and has ten brothers to help him. Late in the story, he also becomes the king's son-in-law, which further increases his power. Ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> has known <sup>C</sup>Antar since birth, and knows that he is an ex-slave (1979: vol. 1, 134). In addition, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> wants <sup>C</sup>Abla as a wife for one of his brothers.

Following the progression of stages outlined above, Ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> at first refrains from openly attacking the hero, acting through the father-in-law or using the enemy knight (stage one of the narrative progression of the primary enemy). Throughout *Sīrat <sup>C</sup>Antar*, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> encourages the father-in-law Mālik to put <sup>C</sup>Antar's in danger of death. First, the two men send a group of slaves to kill him. Later, once <sup>C</sup>Antar becomes a free man, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> suggests Mālik demand a dowry that will be extremely dangerous to acquire.

Ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> becomes a clear enemy (stage two) of the hero when he tries to harm <sup>C</sup>Abla. He sends a servant to <sup>C</sup>Abla with the message that <sup>C</sup>Antar wishes to see her, then has her kidnapped (Vol. 2: 143-204). Another time, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> uses his daughter to make <sup>C</sup>Abla jealous and to try to poison her. The poison fails but <sup>C</sup>Abla insults <sup>C</sup>Antar in front of the tribe's other women.

Throughout the story, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> makes alliances against <sup>C</sup>Antar (stage three), sometimes spending time with his new allies outside the tribe (stage fourth). When the hero and <sup>C</sup>Abla finally marry, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup> openly criticizes Mālik's decision to allow the marriage. The hero kills the primary enemy, ar-Rabī<sup>C</sup>, in the last stage (stage five) of his narrative progression.

### The primary enemy in *Sīrat Sayf*

Two brothers play a joint role of primary enemy in *Sīrat Sayf*, Sqardyūn and Sqardīs. They are viziers or ministers in the court of King Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad of Abyssinia and have enormous power. Right from the beginning, the narrative structure of the *sīra* is obvious; these two enemies are responsible for murdering Sayf's father before the hero is born.

They are opposed to Sayf because of a birthmark, which their sacred writings have warned them about, it could lead to the destruction of the kingdom's religion. Their hatred is not personal but ideological. All their efforts to eliminate the hero are unsuccessful, even though Sqardīs and his brother<sup>3</sup> begin their campaign against Sayf while he is still a child.

In their first stage, that of occult enemies, they work through the king, Sayf's adoptive father, whom Sqardyūn fruitlessly urges to kill the boy. The enmity becomes open (the second stage of the primary enemy's narrative progression) when Sqardyūn is responsible for sending Sayf on a dangerous quest for a dowry (1984: vol. 1, 62-71)<sup>4</sup>. This stage in the role of primary enemy is also clear during the wars that break out between the hero Sayf and king Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad, when Sqardyūn and Sqardīs directly oppose the hero.

The third stage of alliance with the hero's enemies begins when Sqardyūn encourages Afrā<sup>□</sup> to give his daughter's hand in marriage to King Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad.

The two brothers begin to lose ground to Sayf, and to build alliances elsewhere, they escape and seek refuge in foreign countries. This is the fourth stage of the primary enemy's progression. They provoke wars between these new allies and Sayf, then escape when things go badly and begin the cycle again until in the

end they are killed, the fifth and final stage of the narrative progression. The primary enemy lends a more psychological aspect to the story. The *sīra* is no longer a simple list of battles but the story of a deeper conflict between what the hero represents and his clever, intelligent and highly motivated enemies' determination to save their kingdom and their culture.

### The primary enemy in *Qiṣṣat Fayrūz Shāh*

In this Persian story, the primary enemy is the vizier Ṭayfūr. He is a socially prominent character, prime minister to the king of Yemen. He is dedicated to destroying the hero but his motives are not given. This demonstrates the necessity of this enemy for the story's equilibrium, to balance the hero's role. The reader or listener accepts that such an enemy exists even when—as is the case here—his motives are not clearly defined.

His role begins with the second stage of the narrative progression for a primary enemy as he is an open enemy from the beginning, accusing the hero, Fayrūz Shāh, a foreigner in the Yemen royal court, of planning to kidnap the princess (nd : vol. 1, 102). For this, Ṭayfūr has him thrown into prison although he would have preferred to see him executed.

The stage of occult manipulation, normally the first stage of narrative progression, then follows, as the vizier begins working through the future father-in-law in his attempts to rid the kingdom of Fayrūz Shāh. Ṭayfūr also instigates a war between Yemen and Persia and tries to maneuver very strong knights into direct conflict with the hero<sup>5</sup>, using his alliances to do so (third stage of narrative progression). During the war, he feels in danger and takes refuge outside the kingdom (fourth stage).

Ṭayfūr's story comes to an end (fifth and final stage in his narrative progression) in the third volume of the story, when he is captured by Bahrūz, a member of the heroic trio, tortured, and put to death (Vol. 3: 313). The personal conflict between the hero and his powerful primary enemy ends and the fourth volume of the *sīra* is consecrated to the denouement and to the hero's adventures during a war against China.

### The primary enemy in *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān*

The primary enemy in *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān* is Bakhtak. Like the other primary enemies, he is a powerful man, Kisra's prime minister. His opposition to the hero is based on negative feelings about the Arab peoples, whom he considers barbarians. He particularly detests Ḥamza, who is an Arab, because as soon as Ḥamza joins the Persian royal court, Ḥamza insults the minister. Like the other primary enemies, he prefers at first to attack the hero through other characters rather than directly (stage one of the narrative progression).

His first action against Ḥamza is to persuade Kisra to sponsor a battle between the hero and a captive lion. Ḥamza emerges victorious (1985 : vol. 1, 73). Then Bakhtak challenges Ḥamza to break a magnificent wild horse that Kisra owns. Ḥamza succeeds. Next, Bakhtak goads a Persian knight known for his strength into fighting Ḥamza. Ḥamza triumphs once again (Vol. 1: 85-86). Bakhtak convinces Kisra to send Ḥamza to fight a fierce enemy (Vol. 1: 117) and Ḥamza returns victorious. Ḥamza becomes aware of Bakhtak's ploys (stage two) (Vol. 1:

140). Bakhtak sends the hero collect taxes owed the Persian kingdom. He hopes the hero will be killed while carrying out his duties, and in the meantime, he will be in Greece, Palestine and Byzantium, far from the princess (Vol. 1: 194).

True to his role as hero, Ḥamza returns from his adventures safe and sound. In the third stage of alliances, Bakhtak calls upon other knights, whom he arms with poisoned swords and lances to do battle with Ḥamza. It is he who flees the war between the Arabs and the Persians to take refuge with a foreign king (stage four) (Vol. 3: 220). In fact, Bakhtak continues his actions as primary enemy right up to the time of his death at Ḥamza's hands (fifth and final stage of the narrative progression) in the third volume of the *sīra*. His son, Bakhtiyār, will take his place and fulfill the role of primary enemy until he too is killed at the end of the story (Vol. 4: 279).

In *Sīrat Ḥamza*, the primary enemy sends the hero on his adventures, allowing the story to develop. Since his presence is essential to the story, the role must be filled until the end, and this is why we find Bakhtak's son playing the role after his father's death. The primary enemy is a force exterior to the hero, who manipulates others to direct the hero's adventures.

### The role of the future father-in-law in *Sīrat ʿAntar*

The future father in law in *Sīrat ʿAntar* is ʿAbla's father, Mālik, a tribal noble. He is not a clever man, but follows the advice of his more gifted friend, ar-Rabīʿ Ibn Ziyād, the primary enemy in *Sīrat ʿAntar*.

Mālik doesn't like the idea of a black ex-slave whom he considers his social inferior for a son-in-law, even though the hero is gifted in poetry and horsemanship. He follows the typical narrative progression of the father-in-law in the siyar, at first pretending to accept Antar's suit, then going back on his word (stage one). Next, Mālik repeatedly distances ʿAntar from the tribe while putting him in peril at the suggestion of the primary enemy, ar-Rabīʿ Ibn Ziyād<sup>6</sup> (stage two). Contrary to the enemies' hopes, ʿAntar returns from his quest with the dowry, wealthy and covered in glory.

Finally, Mālik takes his daughter and leaves the tribe (stage three), taking refuge in one after another of neighboring tribes, with ʿAntar in pursuit. Each time they change camps, Mālik promises his daughter's hand to the tribal chieftain (stage four) in exchange for protection from ʿAntar, demanding the hero's head as ʿAbla's dowry<sup>7</sup>. Mālik also allies himself with others of ʿAntar's enemies, including enemies of his own tribe (Vol. 2: 307-366)<sup>8</sup>

What causes Mālik to change his mind (stage five) about the hero and allow his daughter to marry him? ʿAntar is persistent, of course, and kills off all the other suitors. In addition, King Qays takes his side and helps convince Mālik to give in to the inevitable. Mālik's role as an enemy comes to an end. Although we do not entirely lose sight of him, his role diminishes greatly in importance. He remains alive until the end of the epic and dies after ʿAntar, killed by ʿAbla's second husband.

### The future father-in-law in *Sīrat Sayf*

Sayf's future father-in-law, King Afrāḥ, is also Sayf's adoptive father. Afrāḥ

protects Sayf as an infant, raises him in the palace, and teaches him to be a knight and warrior. When Sayf is older, Afrāḥ sends him to a famous knight for further instruction, but this also separates Sayf from his beloved Shama, Afrāḥ's daughter. Afrāḥ does not hate Sayf, but is easily influenced by other enemies of the hero. When Sayf asks for Shāma's hand in marriage, Afrāḥ agrees with Sqardīs and Sqardyūn who suggest getting the hero out of the way. The hero is sent to fight a fierce knight (stage two), ostensibly to prove he is worthy of marrying Shāma (1984 : vol. 1. 106) but in reality to try to have him killed. However, when Sayf returns victorious, Afrāḥ does not allow him to marry Shāma, but gives his daughter's hand to King Sayf ArḒad (stage four) and plots with this king to kill Sayf.

The pattern of Afrāḥ's actions influenced by the hero's enemies that are more dedicated remains the same throughout the story. However, since the father-in-law does not truly hate the hero, it is easy to believe later in the story that he returns to his initial warm feelings toward his adopted son and accepts Sayf as his son-in-law (stage five of the father-in-law's narrative progression).

Note that stages one and three of the narrative progression are absent from this *sīra*.

### **The father-in-law in *Sīrat Fayrūz Shāh***

At the beginning of this Persian story, Fayrūz Shāh helps his future father-in-law, King Surūr of Yemen. The king does not know Fayrūz Shāh is a prince; nor that he has traveled to Yemen from Persia to see the princess ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt, renowned for her beauty.

The relationship between Fayrūz Shāh and the king goes well until one night Fayrūz Shāh is caught secretly visiting the princess. Her father, furious, orders his former lieutenant put to death. At the last moment, the king learns Fayrūz Shāh's real identity and spares his life, although he leaves him in prison. From this point on, King Surūr becomes the instrument for the minister Ṭayfūr to carry out his plots against Fayrūz Shāh.

Later, as Surūr grows increasingly aware of Fayrūz Shāh's good qualities, he wants to make peace with him but Ṭayfūr prevents this (nd : vol. 3, 120). Thus, the conflict continues until the end of the *sīra* as the central element of the narrative.

During the conflict between the two men, King Surūr flees each time he loses a battle or a series of battles and takes refuge with his daughter and his court under the protection of another great king of the region (stage three). Each time, he promises to give his daughter in marriage to his new protector<sup>9</sup> (stage four). This ploy allows the storyteller to involve the hero in open conflict with the major powers of the time, the king of Egypt and Caesar of Byzance, for example.

Only at the end is Surūr vanquished and the hero is able to marry ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt (stage five of the narrative progression).

### **The father-in-law in *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān***

In *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān*, the relationship between the hero Ḥamza and his future father-in-law Kisra, king of Persia, begins rather well. Kisra calls Ḥamza

in to help him resist an enemy. During this initial contact with the royal family, Ḥamza falls in love with the princess Mahriddkār. Ḥamza asks permission to marry the girl and Kisra accepts (stage one, although this acceptance is sincere). The king's vizier, Bakhtak the primary enemy, is opposed to the marriage.

Kisra listens to the advice of this minister and tells Ḥamza he must obtain Bakhtak's permission to marry Mahriddkar (a variation of stage two). The minister finds endless pretexts to deny the request. He influences Kisra to send Ḥamza into battle against fierce enemies then send him as tax-collector in hopes that he will be killed (Vol. 1: 149) At the same time, Kisra sends letters to the governors of the countries concerned, encouraging them to kill his own emissary, Ḥamza.

Ḥamza is victorious in every encounter but war breaks out between Ḥamza et Kisra when the king, still following Bakhtak's advice, again refuses to allow his daughter to marry the hero. During this war, Mahriddkār runs away to her suitor's camp, much to her father's chagrin. This precludes stage three and four of the father-in-laws narrative progression. The wedding is held and the war goes on even more fiercely than before. Kisra does not hide his hostility towards the Arabs, and is encouraged in this by Bakhtak. He reaches the point where he is even ready to kill his daughter for having married an Arab (Vol. 2: 160). This war is the subject of much of the *sīra*, lasting into the third volume where Kisra is finally completely defeated (Vol. 3: 152) and peace can once again be established between the victorious hero and his vanquished father-in-law<sup>10</sup> (stage five).

### The future father-in-law in *ʿAjīb and Gharīb* in the *Thousand and One Nights*

There are two future fathers-in-law in the story of *ʿAjīb and Gharīb*. One, Mirdās, is more important than the other. This man is the father of Mahdiya, Gharīb's beloved. As in *Sīrat Sayf*, the father-in-law is also the hero's adoptive father. This theme of father-in-law/adoptive father is common in traditional Arab tales, but not in Persian epics.

The adoptive father raises Gharīb and trains him as a skilful knight. However, the hero falls out of favor when he requests Mahdiya's hand in marriage (a variant on stage one; the father-in-law simply refuses rather than pretending to accept). Mirdās turns against the hero and begins to plot his destruction (nd: vol. 3: 161). He ambushes Gharīb, but during this operation, is himself attacked and captured by other enemies. Gharīb frees him.

Rather than arrange the marriage when he is liberated, Mirdās demands a dowry of Gharīb, the death of Sa<sup>c</sup>dān al-Gūl, a fierce knight (stage two). While Gharīb is gone, Mirdās takes his daughter to Irak (stage three), and seeks refuge under the protection of ʿAjīb<sup>11</sup>. Mirdās gives his daughter's hand in marriage to this king (stage four). However, before the marriage takes place, Gharīb reappears and fights to recover Mahdiya. He has nearly won this battle when Mirdās escapes, taking his daughter with him. Finally, Mirdās is killed (a variation of stage five, with death rather than reconciliation) and Gharīb takes Mahdiya as his first wife.

After Mirdās' death, the second father-in-law enters the scene. His name is Sābūr and he plays the same role that Mirdās had, but with less hostility against Gharīb. Sābūr is king of Persia, and his daughter Fakhr<sup>t</sup>āj is in love with Gharīb. The young woman asks her father's permission to marry the hero after he saved her from Sa<sup>c</sup>dān al-Gūl. The father asks for a dowry (stage one is implied as he moves directly to stage two), the head of a dangerous enemy. Gharīb is victorious.

Then the future father in law sends an army against Gharīb but even this is unsuccessful; the hero wins the battle and marries the young woman (skipping the intermediate stages three and four). In the end, Sābūr's fears of Gharīb as a son-in-law are justified, because the hero kills him when he refuses to convert to Islam (Vol. 3: 228) (repeating the variation introduced earlier in the story of death rather than reconciliation in stage five).

The story of *ʿAjīb and Gharīb* is unlike the other *siyar* we are considering because not only there are two fathers-in-law and no primary enemy, but also because the fathers-in-law act directly and entirely on their own initiative against the hero; other enemies do not manipulate them. Because of this, the stages in the narrative structure do not conform closely to the general outline presented. The initial conflict between them and the hero does not reach a peaceful settlement. In the story of *ʿAjīb and Gharīb* both fathers-in-law meet their death, although it is rare for the character of father-in-law to be killed.

### The enemy knight in *Sīrat ʿAntar*

In *Sīrat ʿAntar*, the enemy knight is active throughout the story, but the role is played by three different characters, al-Ḥārīṭ Ibn Zālim, Ḍu al-Khimār, and al-Asad ar-Rahīṣ. Each one allows the storyteller to describe great battles between the hero and a knight worthy of him. The existence of three enemy knights, successively, fulfills stage two of the narrative progression of this character. There are no ideological motives in the enemy knight's opposition to the hero, no cleverness or subtlety. He is a warrior and his role is to fight.

Al-Ḥārīṭ is a historical character, a great knight who lived in pre-Islamic times. He first appears after *ʿAntar* becomes a free man and a knight, when the storyteller needs to introduce an enemy characterized by qualities as impressive as the hero's (stage one in the narrative progression of the enemy knight). Like the hero, he knows no fear, and like the hero he is a strong and gifted fighter. But he lacks *ʿAntar*'s sense of honor and justice. The enemy knight has no scruples. He is a traitor. He is a violent and envious man. Al-Ḥārīṭ does not survive till the end of the story; he meets his death in the third volume (stage three of his narrative progression)

The second enemy knight, Ḍu al-Khimār, is also a veritable historical figure. This knight's personality is not very different from that of al-Ḥārīṭ but more conflicts that are direct are between him and *ʿAntar*. Ḍu al-Khimār will be present until the end of the *sīra*.

Often, Ḍu al-Khimār allies himself with other enemies of the hero or the hero's tribe such as the Jewish knight, Jabbār Ibn Ṣakhr (Cherkaoui, 2001: 101) or the Persian king, Kisra, against the Arabs, with the intention of destroying *ʿAntar* (Cherkaoui, 2001: 137). Ḍu al-Khimār even makes alliances with Arabs who oppose *ʿAntar* and his tribe. After the hero's death, Ḍu al-Khimār will take on *ʿNītra*, the hero's daughter. This enemy knight is not killed in the *sīra*. He is one of the rare characters who survive the entire *sīra*. However, from a narrative point of view, his friendship with the hero has the same effect as his death would have (stage three), since it leaves *ʿAntar* without a knight adversary. For this reason, the storyteller introduces the character of the enemy knight al-Asad, a good warrior whose role follows the pattern we have already described

for the enemy knight. He is a less important character because he is present for a shorter time in the *sīra*, but he does have a dramatic effect on the story in the end, when he shoots the hero with a poisoned arrow and kills him (Vol. 8: 279); at the same time, the hero kills this enemy knight (stage three).

### The enemy knight in *Sīrat Sayf*

Here, the enemy knight is a king, Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad, king of Abyssinia, whom we mentioned when discussing the primary enemy. His opposition to the hero is personal because he is Sayf's rival for the hand of the princess Shāma (stage one of the narrative progression). However, he also lets himself be manipulated by the primary enemy, putting his hatred for the hero at the service of this much more clever character. In addition, Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad himself is a worthy opponent to the hero –he has a gift for strategy<sup>12</sup>.

Sayf Ar<sup>C</sup>ad most often appears obliquely in the story, through the conversations of Sqardīs and Sqardyūn as they threaten Afrāḥ; he does not often appear on the battlefield opposite Sayf. He sends his army against Afrāḥ, and thus against Sayf, but plays a secondary role to the two ministers Sqardīs and Sqardyūn. This is perhaps to be expected as his role as king raises him somewhat above the other characters in the story and creates a certain distance between him and them. He is present throughout the story (stage two) and killed in the end (stage three).

### The enemy knight in *Qiṣṣat Fayrūz Shāh*

In this Persian story, the role of enemy knight is played by Ṭūmār, a black giant from Abyssinia who had come to fight King Surūr of Yemen to avenge the two brothers he lost in that country. Unlike the enemy knights in *Sīrat <sup>C</sup>Antar* and *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān*, Ṭūmār's presence is brief (exception to stage two of the narrative progression). He appears late in (Vol. 1: 275), immediately becomes the hero's enemy (stage one) and is killed shortly thereafter in his duel with Fayrūz Shāh (stage three). His brother, who takes over the role of enemy knight, is as strong as Ṭūmār and his appearance is equally brief, also ending in death. Both Ṭūmār and his brother are ferocious enemies always eager to attack the hero. They are described as giants; they ride elephants and seem to have been introduced into the story with the simple goal of demonstrating the hero's strength, as he conquers them.

### The enemy knight in *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān*

The enemy knight's role in *Sīrat Ḥamza al-Bahlawān* resembles that found in *Sīrat <sup>C</sup>Antar*. The role of enemy knight is played by the great knight Zūbīn, (Vol.1: 244) who has volunteered to rid King Kisra of the hero Ḥamza (stage one); as a reward, he will marry the princess Mahridkār. He tries treachery to attain his goal. Unlike the other enemy knights we have considered, Zūbīn tries to avoid face-to-face confrontation. Sometimes he has no choice but he always finds another way if he can.

Even though the storyteller states at the beginning that Zūbīn's motive is his desire to marry Mahridkār, he continues his feud with the hero after the princess marries Ḥamza (stage two). At this point, we learn that Zūbīn now intends to

marry a woman from the Persian royal court but that he continues to fight Ḥamza to avenge his loss of Mahridkār as well as to impress the new woman. Zūbīn is finally captured and killed by a Persian woman warrior (stage three) who is to become Ḥamza's daughter-in-law. His death comes about as a result of his previous treachery but not directly as a result of his conflict with the protagonist.

### **The enemy knight in the story of *ʿAjīb and Gharīb* in the *Thousand and One Nights***

The enemy knight is ʿAjīb, king of Iraq. He is also the half-brother of the hero Gharīb. He is a good example of the treachery that characterizes the enemy knight's personality. At the beginning of the story, he kills his father and takes over the kingdom. He orders his slaves to kill his father's second wife, who is pregnant with Gharīb (stage one: in this case, hatred even before the birth of the hero); he fears the future rival to whom she could give birth. The first murder attempt fails but later, ʿAjīb does kill Gharīb's mother, although too late to prevent Gharīb's birth.

The two brothers confront one another in various wars. Each time, ʿAjīb loses. He flees from one kingdom to another, seeking the aid of the kings of Oman and India (stage two). In the end of the story, again taken prisoner by his brother, he is executed (Vol. 3: 215) when he refuses to convert to Islam (stage three).

The relationship between the hero and the enemy knight in this tale is special, as there is a family relationship between the two that we do not find elsewhere. This is in contrast to the sort of "professional jealousy" that we find in *Sīrat ʿAntar*, where the enemy knights are jealous of the success and fame of the hero and seek to prove they are better than he is.

### **Conclusion**

As we examine the role of the enemy trio, we see that Arabic popular literature, which may appear to be a chaotic collection of short war stories, is indeed organized both in its overall structure, based on opposing trios (heroic trio and enemy trio) and in its internal structure (the narrative stages the enemies pass through as discussed above, and the stages of the hero, discussed in a previous article (Cherkaoui, 2002: 75-101). The narrative structure is coherent and present in the various siyar, as we have seen in the comparison above.

The structure of opposing trios in the siyar provides hints of the worldview of the pre-Islamic peoples of the Arabic Peninsula and Persia. Physical battle was common and engaged under many circumstances: in a struggle for land, water, pasture (wealth) or to win the hand of the beloved (desire), to protect the tribe, particularly its women, if attacked (home), or to defend a man's honor. The measure of a hero is found in the power and cleverness of his enemy. Poetic self-glorification on the part of the knights was a very important complement to his physical strength; a man who composed great poetry was much admired. Enemies did not necessarily remain enemies; they might be conquered by the hero and pass into his camp.

Much research remains to be done on these siyar, which have survived the centuries to live on in the folklore and imagination of Moslem people even today.

Possible topics include the stages of development of secondary characters, the role of women in the siyar, the influence of Islam on a literature that existed before Islam but continued to transform itself, orally, after the advent of that religion, a comprehensive study of historical elements present in the siyar. Fortunately, these epics have become more accessible recently with new and more complete translations, and have awakened interest in modern scholars who no longer look down on them as in inferior literary form.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This triangular structure is not limited to Arabic literature; according to Dumézil, the Indo-European tradition also has three types of epic characters, the hero, the sorcerer and the king. He says that these are based on archetypes, which carried over into later myths and epics as they developed. Other literary traditions also use triangular structures; even the common Western most often weaves its story around a hero, a victim and a “bad guy”.

<sup>2</sup> There is no primary enemy as such in this story, but the presence of two fathers-in-law compensates for this lack. Furthermore, the story of *ʿAjīb and Gharīb*, is much shorter than the other siyar we consider. It doesn’t need as many elements to support its narrative structure.

<sup>3</sup> However, the baby Sayf has other problems: he was abandoned by his mother in a forest.

<sup>4</sup> First, Sayf is sent to fight Saʿdūn az-Zinji; when he successfully accomplishes this task, he is given one even more difficult, that of finding the Book of the Nile.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Ṭayfūr convinces Ṭūmār that Persians killed his brother. Ṭūmār, who had come with the intention of taking revenge on the Yemenis, turns his strength against Fayrūz Shāh and the Persians instead.

<sup>6</sup> The cultural context must be understood: the suitor was expected to provide his intended with a dowry determined by the girl’s father as a condition to marriage.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the Banu Shaybān tribe, Mālik asks for the protection of the king Qays Ibn Masʿūd. Qays has a son Bisṭām who had heard of ʿAbla’s great beauty, and he decides to ask for her hand in marriage. Mālik tells him to bring him ʿAntar’s head as a dowry. Another time, Mālik fled with ʿAbla and found refuge with ʿUmar al-Maqsūr, chief of the Kindite tribe, and there he gave ʿAbla’s hand to Musahḥal, the chief’s nephew. ʿAntar organizes an ambush during which he kills Musahḥal and takes ʿAbla back.

<sup>8</sup> An example of this is the episode when ʿAntar frees Mālik from some enemies who had captured him, and entrusts these new prisoners to his future father-in-law, Mālik not only releases them but allies himself with them, even accompanying them on a raid against the ʿAbs.

<sup>9</sup> Surūr promises ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt’s hand in marriage to the son of the king of Egypt, then to Caesar’s son.

<sup>10</sup> This peace does not last long, however, because Kisra dies shortly and war breaks out between his son and Ḥamza.

<sup>11</sup> This is reminiscent of the third stage in the evolution of Mālik, ʿAntar’s father-in-law.

<sup>12</sup> We see evidence of intelligence, for example in the scene where he finds himself confronted with both Afrāḥ and Qamariyya, two of his enemies. He makes peace with Afrāḥ, but imposes the condition that the latter go to war against Qamariyya. The idea being, of course, that one of his enemies will get rid of the other one for him.